

Filed for intro on 05/10/2000

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 820
By Harper

A RESOLUTION to honor and commend the Greater St. John
Missionary Baptist Church.

WHEREAS, this General Assembly takes great pleasure in paying tribute to the dedicated members of those exemplary religious organizations who, through their hard work and dedication, have stood the test of time to serve as examples for present and future generations; and

WHEREAS, the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church of Nashville is most assuredly one such extraordinary group of people who are deserving of special praise and commendation; and

WHEREAS, the historic St. John Missionary Baptist Church is reflective of the depths of loyalty, sincere devotion, and matchless fortitude which dwell in the hearts of its heroic members; and

WHEREAS, in July 1879, Reverend Harrison Harding came upon a handful of people living in a community on Old Hillsboro Road called Jones Lane; they gathered in a member's

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home and organized themselves into a church congregation; they were named the St. John Missionary Baptist Church of Jones Lane; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Harding became the first pastor of the newly formed church, and under his astute leadership the church experienced steady growth and the members exemplified a wonderful spirit of Christianity; and

WHEREAS, upon Reverend Harding's resignation, the congregation continued to worship in the members' homes until an old storefront was secured on Patterson Street; the church remained there until its members were able to construct a small building on State Street; and

WHEREAS, they were joined by Reverend J.A. Kirkpatrick and moved to Fisk Alley for a short time; subsequently, they moved to Pearl Street and built an old harbor, a tent building, out of old pieces of tin, rags, sacks, and bed ticking with brush for the covering and sawdust on the floor; and

WHEREAS, the congregation's size and monetary funds grew rapidly; Reverend Johnnie Graham and three of the deacons led the way for the erection of the first St. John Church Building next to the lot where the tent had been; and

WHEREAS, the church reflects on the lives of those servants who have gone on to glory in God; during the construction of the permanent place of worship, a dedicated member and friend, Bro Hugh Johnson, met with an accident and died after weeks of illness; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Kirkpatrick was often referred to as Father Kirkpatrick by many of the members; he labored long and hard, leading a growing congregation; and

WHEREAS, after his resignation, Reverend D.A. Weakly, a young minister of the congregation, succeeded as pastor; and

WHEREAS, when Reverend Weakly moved to East Nashville, the congregation was once again faced with a period of waiting; Reverend W.H. Whitaker then accepted the Pastor's position at St. John Missionary Baptist Church; the church took on a new life under his leadership, one that lasted for twelve years; and

WHEREAS, upon Reverend Whitaker's resignation, the congregation faced a trying time, but the members stood strong, waiting on God's answer; through hardships, tears, scorn, and disappointments, the God whom they served and trusted came to their aide by sending Reverend John Wesley Pitts; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Pitts rekindled the flame of hope, and a brighter day was dawning for this once discouraged congregation; after one year of his leadership and fearless gospel preaching, the beautiful upper auditorium was erected and on May 15, 1927, Reverend Pitts and the congregation marched into this new church building praising and thanking God for deliverance; and

WHEREAS, at the time, the church was known as the largest and most modern church in North Nashville; and

WHEREAS, after Reverend Pitts could no longer direct the religious affairs at St. John, Reverend Samuel Henry Simpson of Galveston, Texas assumed the pastorate on July 2, 1927; and

WHEREAS, Reverend Simpson guided and strengthened the congregation spiritually and financially for 32 years and, as a result of the extensive progress that had been made, he named the church Greater St. John; and

WHEREAS, after Reverend Simpson's resignation from the church in 1959, Reverend F.M. Spence accepted the call to lead the congregation; and

WHEREAS, during Reverend Spence's exemplary 28-year tenure, the church grew spiritually, materially, and financially, and numerous individuals were added to the congregation; a new organ, communion table, central heat and air, were added and extensive remodeling was done; and

WHEREAS, as Greater St. John advanced, Reverend Spence also advanced in the ministry by devoting countless hours to his studies, earning his Doctor of Divinity Degree in 1973; and

WHEREAS, beginning under the pastorate of Reverend Kirkpatrick, J.A. Turner “Brother Joe” served with acumen and alacrity as the assistant pastor and general superintendent; “A front line Sunday School” was always his aim; the congregation memorialized his death in October, 1973; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Spence retired in 1986, and Reverend Herbert Brown was appointed assistant pastor; after Dr. Spence’s resignation due to illness in 1987, Reverend Brown took charge of the congregation; and

WHEREAS, during Pastor Brown’s estimable tenure at Greater St. John, there have been numerous accomplishments; a new van was purchased for church use, members have pledged to tithe as God would have them do, and several programs have been successfully implemented including the Children’s Church, the Young Disciples of Christ, Youth and Young Adult Choirs, Children’s Bible Study, Bylaws Committee, a Girls Scout Troop, a new trustee and deacon board, and annual church picnic; and

WHEREAS, land was purchased on Clarksville Highway for the building of a new church; the property was dedicated on September 16, 1995 and plans were drawn for the new edifice and the slogan “Catch the Vision” was coined; and

WHEREAS, feeling blessed to have had such a long and intriguing history, although difficult to leave their old home, the members of the congregation knew it was time for them to move to a new location; and

WHEREAS, the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church has weathered the storms of life for well over a century and is still pressing toward the attainment of the higher calling of God in Christ Jesus; and

WHEREAS, almost 121 years later, the congregation of the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church stands today as a welcoming fellowship, striving to be faithful in worship, discipleship, and reaching into the world with the Good News of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, this blessed church and its congregation have grown and prospered as an institution of time-honored family values and selfless love; and

WHEREAS, the future promises continued blessings for the good people who comprise the membership of the church's congregation; and

WHEREAS, religious organizations such as the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church are truly the rock-solid foundation upon which our society is built and a beacon of sanity and continuity in these turbulent times, and the members of this fine congregation should be appropriately honored for their exemplary service to their fellow Christians and to the good people of Tennessee; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FIRST GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we hereby pause to honor and commend the congregation at the Greater St. John Missionary Baptist Church, applaud their efforts to glorify God as they move into a new place of worship, and extend to them our best wishes for every future happiness in service to the Lord.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.